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7 Tips to Grow Your Rural Business with Purpose and Meaning

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The Rural Futures Institute at the University of Nebraska and Nebraska Extension

No one can predict the future; however, rural entrepreneurs and business owners can use a future-focused leadership approach, which includes examining megatrends, to shape the future of their businesses. Megatrends are global shifts that influence society, the economy and the environment. The purpose of this article is to help rural entrepreneurs discover ways to grow their businesses with Living with Purpose and Meaning Megatrend.

Living with Purpose and Meaning: Creating Business Opportunities

The tools that have helped people create their own businesses and design their lives in ways that best suit them, have also fueled the Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend. Purposeful living is shaping everything from healthcare to education.

Our society is quickly evolving into an era characterized by shared purpose and meaning. Personal fulfillment is a growing trend in business and entrepreneurship. People are looking to decrease their levels of stress and strengthen their healthy habits while finding greater fulfillment.

The Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend will continue to grow as the global population increases and places more demands on the planet's limited natural resources. What does this mean for rural entrepreneurs? They may be able to grow by connecting to people through purpose and meaning. Technology may be one way future-focused entrepreneurs can holistically add more purpose and meaning to the lives of both clients and employees.

For example, a forecast by Carbone and Nauth (2012) describes the evolution of the “cloud” from a repository of information to an intelligent resource that can help make decisions and provide assistance. They discuss the cloud evolving from a place to store data to an intelligent resource that will actively help people improve their lives:

Virtual agents will migrate from being an automated form of phone-based customer service to a personalized form of support and assistance that provides information and—more importantly—performs useful tasks. For example, such agents might design a weekly menu based on a family's health profile, fitness goals, and eating preferences, and automatically order ingredients.

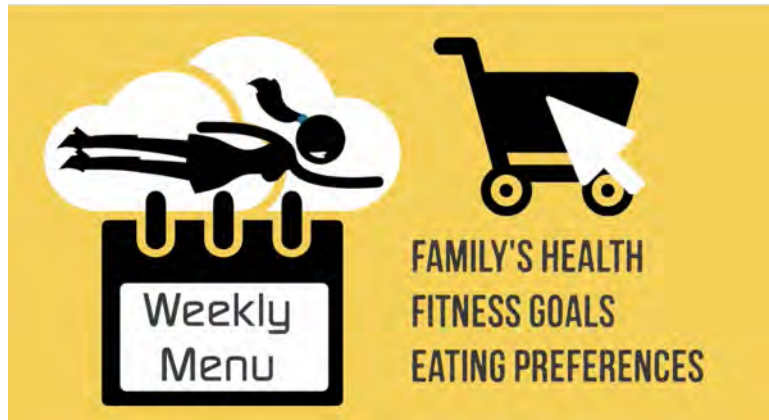
Check out our video on the Living with Purpose and Meaning Megatrend: <http://go.unl.edu/06ma>

This forecast provides an example of how entrepreneurs can use technology to help their organizations innovate with a focus on the future. A transition from cloud-based computing to cloud-based living and learning might help rural entrepreneurs focus on new profit centers, customer experiences and employees in a more holistic manner.

Life Flowing Together and Well-Being

Two trends supporting the Living with Purpose and Meaning megatrend include: 1) life increasingly flowing together instead of being compartmentalized into work, family, recreation, etc., and 2) the quest for greater well-being, health and vitality.

People are increasingly learning and living on the go in both the virtual and physical senses, which blurs the lines between family, self-care, work and play. Research has demonstrated that happiness is a precursor to success. These findings question the view that hard work will lead to success, which eventually leads to happiness. Raising levels of positivity in the present creates a “happiness advantage” in the brain, leading to better outcomes in the areas of education, business and well-being (Achor, 2011).



How do these trends influence rural entrepreneurship? As more people want to connect with their purpose, find meaning in their lives, and increase their vitality, businesses and communities should take a more people-centered approach focused on meaning, well-being and the mind-body connection, supported by the right social networks, experiences and technologies. A few ideas might include:

- Integrating holistic, healthy living and self-care principles into business practices in an effort to create better employee and customer experiences and to create more value in products and services.
- Providing coaching for employees to help them uncover their purpose and to create strategies and structures to support meaningful actions designed to improve their careers and lives.
- Adding physical activity and fun into the workday in an effort to stimulate creativity decrease stress build camaraderie and strengthen overall wellness.



It's time to focus on the whole person and what life means to each individual. Helping people find their fulfillment, purpose and definition of success may provide future-focused leaders and entrepreneurs with tools to innovate their organizations and communities. Rural businesses should find new ways to add increased value to the lives of customers, employees and families. People can choose where they want to work, shop and live. They also choose how to invest their time and money.

Coaching Tips for Rural Entrepreneurs:

1. Develop a clear purpose. Clarity of purpose creates a meaningful path to success. A great coaching tool to use: Create a vision board with your "why" in mind.
2. Define core values. A business should develop core values that truly represent its brand. Empowered consumers connect with brands and businesses that have core values similar to their own. Outline the core values of your business and what each value means. A great strategic plan can evolve from clear core values. Make your values public. Share them with world. They help tell your story!
3. Make self-care a priority. Physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being are all important. Successful entrepreneurs and their teams need time for creativity and a lot of energy to grow their ventures!
4. Get positive. A positive mindset has been scientifically proven to support everything from creativity and innovation to increased sales and employee engagement.
5. Practice gratitude. Keep a physical or digital journal to help. Tools, such the Gratitude 365 Journal App, can record daily gratitudes.
6. Share the stories that enhance your brand with your team and your customers. Use social media platforms to create and present meaningful content worth reading and sharing. People connect with experiences and stories behind the products and services they use!
7. HAVE FUN! Fun is absolutely invaluable. It decreases stress and improves relationship. Fun is also a foundation to creativity and innovation (Reimers-Hild, 2013).

Rural Entrepreneurs: Combining the Human Touch with Technology

Interestingly enough, the hottest jobs at Facebook require a "human touch." Why? Facebook is looking for people who can close sales because its revenue relies heavily on ads (Anders, 2014). Perhaps the most future-focused entrepreneurial leaders are blending "high human touch" with "high-tech" in new and interesting ways that holistically add value to the lives of others.

Future-focused, entrepreneurial leaders in rural areas can use megatrends and technology to change the game of life. One person cannot do it alone in a world that continues to change at an increasingly rapid pace; rather, rural entrepreneurs should innovate in communities with a spirit of cooperation, creativity, and purpose. Together, with a common purpose, rural entrepreneurs can examine megatrends, utilize emerging technologies, and monitor analytics while creating meaningful experiences and innovating rural businesses in ways not yet imagined.

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